GILLESPIES

TENDRING AND COLCHESTER BORDERS GARDEN COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT REVIEW

East Colchester Growth Area Option Environmental Audit Update 2022

FEBRUARY 2022

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0.1 Gillespies have been commissioned to support Colchester Borough Council (CBC) and Tendring District Council (TDC) in partnership with Essex County Council (ECC) (the Councils) in updating the East of Colchester Growth Area Environmental Audit- Landscape and Ecology sections along with high level biodiversity net gain calculations (to be completed) to support the ongoing work to develop the Development Plan Document (DPD) for the Tendring and Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC). It relates to three distinct tasks as follows:

- Task 1: Environmental audit- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity (LVIA) section update
- Task 2: Environmental audit- Ecology and Nature Conservation section update
- Task 3: High level Biodiversity net gain calculations (to be completed).

The Ecology and Nature Conservation section update and high level biodiversity net gain calculations (to be completed) are contained in a separate report by TMA, Tendring and Colchester Borders Garden Community, Environmental Audit Review Ecology and Nature Conservation, November 2021.

The scope of this report involves updating the Landscape sections of the existing East of Colchester Growth Area Environmental Audit, Chris Blandford Associates, 2015[1] to identify any changes and reflect the current conditions (autumn 2021). Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) was commissioned by Colchester Borough Council to undertake an Environmental Audit of the land to the east of Colchester, which includes land within Tendring District. The review covers the full study area included in the 2015 audit and in addition will include the listed sections of Wivenhoe Park Registered Park and Garden.

1.0.2 The Landscape/Townscape Character And Visual Amenity Section update comprised the following tasks:

- Methodology review and update of the 2015 report to reference current guidance;
- Reviewing 2015 baseline data and ensure current- identify areas that may be sensitive to change;
- Reviewing 2021 landscape assessment work done for the proposed A120/A133 Link Road and summary of the findings;
- Desktop review of developments built since 2015;
- Study Area work to verify character area assessments and confirm changes to the visual appraisal in the field taking account of any changes from 2015 to cover any new developments and Wivenhoe Park;
- Updating photographs, commentary and viewpoint plan.

1.1 BACKGROUND

[1] East of Colchester Growth Area Environmental Audit, Chris Blandford Associates, 2015,https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/East%20of%20Colchester%20Growth%20Area%20Environmental%20Audit%20Part%201%20Nov%202015.pdf, (date accessed: 10/12/21)

1.1.1 The Borough of Colchester covers an area of 324 square kilometers in North East Essex. It is located approximately 60 miles North East of London and also lies in close proximity to the seaport of Harwich (20 miles) and Stansted Airport (30 miles). It borders Babergh District in Suffolk to the north and the districts of Tendring, Braintree and Maldon to the east, west and south west respectively. Colchester's population is currently estimated at 197,200 (ONS Mid-Year Population estimates, 2020).

1.1.2 Colchester's population is projected to grow significantly over the next 20 years. To plan for this population growth, Colchester Borough Council is producing a new Local Plan to guide development in the Borough to 2033 and beyond. The current Local Plan is the North Essex Authorities' Shared Strategic Section 1 Adopted February 2021.

1.1.3 In 2015, Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) was commissioned by Colchester Borough Council to undertake an Environmental Audit of the land to the east of Colchester (the 'Study Area'), which includes land within Tendring District. This document is a 2021 revision of the Environmental Audit. The location of the Study Area is shown on **Figure 1.1**, and the Study Area boundary is illustrated in more detail on **Figure 1.2**.

1.1.4 In accordance with the Council's requirements, the purpose of the Environmental Audit is to provide a preliminary appraisal of the constraints and opportunities for development of the Study Area in respect of the following environmental considerations:

- Ecology and Nature Conservation. (TMA, Tendring and Colchester Borders Garden Community, Environmental Audit Review Ecology and Nature Conservation, November 2021.)
- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity.

1.1.5 Other environmental considerations that may present constraints to development on the Study Area, such as water quality and flood risk, cultural heritage or agricultural land use for instance, are beyond the scope of this Environmental Audit.

1.1.6 In line with the purpose of the Environmental Audit, the appraisals are largely based on review of currently available desk-top information, supplemented by targeted field surveys as appropriate. While access to private land within the Study Area was not possible within the timescales of this Environmental Audit, it is considered that this was not a significant limitation on the robustness of the preliminary appraisals due to the extensive network of public rights of way through the Study Area. The update included access to Wivenhoe Park.

1.1.7 Where further more detailed investigations are required to inform Study Area masterplanning, environmental assessment and mitigation, these are recommended in the respective sections.

1.2 Structure of the Environmental Audit

1.2.1 The Environmental Audit update is structured as follows:

- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity

1.2.2 The reportprovides:

- a general introduction to the section
- a brief summary of the audit methodology (including any limitations)
- a description of the existing conditions
- an appraisal of the constraints and opportunities for development (including recommendations for further work as appropriate)

1.2.3 Drawing on the findings of the individual appraisals, mitigation measures for avoiding or reducing potential adverse environmental effects through the Study Area masterplanning and assessment process are recommended. These also include identification of opportunities for incorporating Green Infrastructure features into the development of the Study Area. It should be noted that the mitigation measures are not exhaustive; they are intended to provide broad guidance on the type of measures that are likely to be necessary in order to achieve a sustainable development on the Study Area.

1.2.4 A summary of the Environmental Audit's key findings and conclusions is also provided.

1.3 Study Areas

1.3.1 An appropriate Study Area has been defined to allow the relevant issues that may influence the suitability of the site for development to be adequately considered. Where appropriate, reference is also made to the wider context of the Study Area. The study area is shown on **Figure 1.2** and reflects that assessed in 2015 and has been extended to include the Grade II Registered Historic Park and Garden to ensure potential development impacts on the park are adequately considered.

3.0 LANDSCAPE/TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL AMENITY

3.1 General

3.1.1 The purpose of this section is to identify potential constraints and opportunities for development of the Study area in landscape and visual terms.

3.1.2 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) aims to promote co-operation on improving approaches to the planning, management and protection of landscapes throughout Europe. The ELC states that 'landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. This appraisal adopts the broad and inclusive ELC definition of landscape embracing townscapes and riverscapes, as well as all forms of rural landscape.

3.2 Audit Methodology

3.2.1 Potential landscape/townscape character and visual amenity effects that could result from development of the Study Area have been determined by assessing the degree of change to the existing landscape character and amenity of sensitive visual receptors within the Study Area.The methodology used for the appraisal is based on the guidance set out in adapted as appropriate for the purposes of this Environmental Audit:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (The LandscapeInstitute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (The CountrysideAgency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002)

3.2.2 In line with the above guidance, the appraisal includes a desk-based review of currently available landscape character studies and other relevant information, supplemented by targeted field survey work, updated in 2021.

3.2.3 The desk-based review included consideration of the following information:

- National Character Area Profiles (Natural England, 2013/2014);
- Essex Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2003);
- Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2005);
- Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, 2001);

- Townscape Character Assessments for Colchester, Tiptree, West Mersea and Wivenhoe(Chris Blandford Associates, 2006);
- Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough (Chris BlandfordAssociates, 2005);
- Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough (Chris BlandfordAssociates, 2005);
- Assessment of Open Countryside between Settlements in the Borough of Colchester (Chris Blandford Associates, 2009);
- 1:25,000 & 1:10,000 scale OS mapping; and
- Aerial photography (Google Maps/Bing Maps).
- A120/A133 Link Road EIA Scoping Report (Essex Highways, July 2020)

3.2.4 A field survey of the Study Area was undertaken in September 2021 from the extensive network ofpublic rights of way through the Study Area. This included taking photographs from representative views within the Study Area.

Study Area

3.2.5 The Study Area was defined by modelling the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) of the Site using GIS software as shown on **Figure 2.1**. The field survey work established that the actual Zone of Visual Influence (or visual envelope) of the Study Area is far more limited than the ZTV suggests due to the screening effects of intervening buildings and vegetation.

3.2.6 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) has been digitally mapped using a computer model to show areas from which the Site may be theoretically visible. The ZTV mapping uses elevation data to create a digital terrain model and calculate intervisibility between points. The ZTV does not take account of screening by buildings, structures and vegetation that will influence potential visibility.

3.2.7 The point locations and heights used within the model are for indicative purposes only. The ZTV is calculated for 7 points, each 1m above the ground, spaced evenly across within the study area boundary, Viewer height is 2m above ground level. Maximum distance from points is 15km.

Tendring Plain (E3)

- Large flat farmland plateau, dissected by occasional small narrow valleys.
- Arable land use dominates, but with some pasture and orchards.
- Straight and regular field patterns with mainly low trimmed hedgerows.
- Widely dispersed blocks of woodland/small copses, sparse tree cover in the north.
- Former heathland character near Colchester.

Colchester and Environs (G4)

- Historic town core with a strong grid pattern on a low hill above the River Colne.
- Residential and commercial development wraps over valleysides or slightly elevated flatterland.
- Uninterrupted valley floor of the Colne forms a ribbon of green space running through thecentre of the urban area.
- Large blocks of woodlands and open spaces on some valleysides.
- Variable size regular hedgerowed fields in the fringing farmland.

3.3 Existing Conditions

Topography and Watercourses

3.3.1 The majority of the Study Area lies between 45m AOD in the far north, and 30m AOD towards the south. See **Figure 2.2** for details. The majority of the Study Area topography is gently undulating, whilst the narrow and steep-sided river valley of Salary Brook crosses the Study Area in the north and followsits western edge, falling to 2m AOD. In the south eastern corner of the Study Area there is a change in topography associated with Sixpenny Brook, where the land forms a shallow sided valley, falling to around 25m AOD.

Vegetation

3.3.2 The vegetation within the Study Area is varied (see **Figure 1.1**). On the eastern edge of Colchester it is composed of intensive arable farmland. Blocks of ancient woodland including Wallis Wood and Churn Wood are found on the southern side of the Salary Brook river valley, along with another area of ancient woodland in the far north of the Study Area. Wooded areas are also associated with Sixpenny Brook in the south-east of the Study Area. The majority of the field boundaries are formed by mature hedges and Shaws, particularly in the north and around fields close to settlement. Along the majority of the road corridors, dense and high hedges and trees restrictvisibility.

Land Use

3.3.3 Land use within the Study Area is dominated by arable farming, with blocks of ancient woodland along the valley edge towards the north. The A133 bisects the Study Area, from the eastern edge ofColchester to Elmstead Market. The northern edge is defined by the major transport corridor ofthe A120, and the A137 also crosses the Study Area in the north. The urban edge of Colchester is located to the west, with a new development parcel extending the Colchester fringes, to the north-west of the Study Area; to the south is the town of Wivenhoe, and to the east is the village of Elmstead Market, with new development extending to the west and north of Elmstead Market. Salary Brook runs from Ardleigh reservoir to the north of the A120, to the eastern edge of Colchester, where it follows the valley along the edge of Colchester/ Study Area boundary until it joins the River Colne beyond the south-western

edge of the Study Area. Other waterfeatures include Sixpenny Brook, in the south-eastern quarter of the Study Area, and restored sand and gravel pits. Features of interest include extensive sand and gravel workings to the east of Wivenhoe, and the University of Essex Study Area at Wivenhoe Park (outside the Study Area boundary).

National Character Areas

3.3.4 The Assessment Area is covered by National Character Area 11[2], see **Figure 2.3**, the NorthernThames Basin. The following key characteristics are relevant to the Study Area:

- The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys.
- Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.
- Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that havealluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.
- A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs riseat the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area
- The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.
- The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi- natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.
- The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.
- Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly aroundColchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.
- The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt,

[2] NCA Profile: 111 Northern Thames Basin (Natural England, 2013) www.naturalengland.com date accessed: 10/12/21

water vole, dormouse and otter.

- Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London.

3.3.5 To the south of the Assessment Area, National Character Area 81[8], see **Figure 2.3**, the GreaterThames Estuary. The following key characteristics are relevant to the Study Area:

- Predominantly flat, low-lying coastal landscape where extensive open spaces are dominated by the sky, and the pervasive presence of water and numerous coastal estuaries extend themaritime influence far inland.
- Eastern edge of the London Basin with its underlying geology of the extensive London Clay, containing important sites for geodiversity including fossiliferous deposits, and overlain byproductive loamy soils derived from intertidal alluvial muds.
- Geological contrast and variety along the coastline provided by Sheppey, a long, low islandrising from a stretch of very flat marsh along the Swale Estuary in Kent with low, steep claycliffs facing towards Essex, and Mersea Island in the Blackwater Estuary in Essex.
- Coastline of major geomorphological interest for its coastal processes. Accretion of material carried by the sea from the north recharges intertidal coastal habitats, which are subject tocoastal squeeze from rising sea levels.
- Open grazing pastures patterned by a network of ancient and modern reed-fringed drainage ditches and dykes, numerous creeks and few hedges or fences, with tree cover a rarity.
- Traditional unimproved wet pasture grazed with sheep and cattle combined with extensivedrained and ploughed arable land protected from floods by sea walls, with some areas of more mixed agriculture on higher ground.
- Strong feelings of remoteness and wilderness persist on extensive salt marshes, mudflats and reclaimed farmed marshland, which support internationally important plants, invertebrates and populations of breeding and overwintering birds, notably overwintering Brent geese.
- Open mosaic habitats on brownfield sites support nationally important invertebrate assemblages and key populations of rare invertebrate species.
- Distinctive landmarks of coastal military heritage including Napoleonic military defenses, forts and 20th-century pillboxes.
- Some of the least settled parts of the English coast with numerous small villages and hamlets on higher ground and marsh edges reflecting medieval patterns and the coastal economy.

Essex Landscape Character Assessment

3.3.6 The Essex Landscape Character Assessment[9] has identified the following landscape character areas

within the Study Area. These are shown on **Figure 2.4**:

- Tendring Plain (E3)
- Colchester and Environs (G4)
- North Colchester Farmlands (E4)
- South Colchester Farmlands (E2)
- North Blackwater and Colne Coastal Farmlands (F5)

3.3.7 The following key characteristics for each character area are relevant to the Study Area:

North Colchester Farmlands (E4)

- Flat arable farmland, with regular fields and low trimmed hedgerows.
- Isolated linear woods.
- Generally wide views.
- Large apple orchards introduce interest and variety.
- Many smallholdings and glasshouses.

South Colchester Farmlands (E2)

- Mix of small regular pasture and large arable fields.
- Dense woodland in the Roman River valley.
- Enclosed, intimate character in the north, more open in the south.
- Complex settlement pattern of nucleated and linear villages/hamlets, and farmsteads alongdispersed lanes.
- Distinctive elongated large waterbody of Abberton Reservoir within a shallow valley.

North Blackwater and Colne Coastal Farmlands (F5)

- Gently sloping arable farmland with intermittent tall elm hedgerows.
- Significant areas of grazing marsh and saltmarsh associated with narrow estuarine inlets andoutlets, channels and creeks.
- Small villages/hamlets and isolated farmsteads mainly on higher land, with a few creeksidevillages.
- Tranquil character.
- Mostly tranquil, secluded character.

Colchester Borough and Tendring District Level Landscape Character Areas

3.3.8 The Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment[10] has identified the followinglandscape character areas within the Study Area. These are shown on **Figure 2.5**:

Wooded Roman River Valley (A2)

- Relatively steep and wooded slopes of narrow v-shaped Roman River valley (tributary of theColne River);
- Large areas of deciduous and coniferous (mixed) woodland on the valley slopes (e.g.Donyland Wood, Friday Wood and Chest Wood);
- Small patches of ancient woodland on the valley sides;
- Large regular fields on northern valley slopes with a concentration of smaller irregular fieldsat High Park Corner;
- Several areas of historic parkland, often associated with halls, overlooking the valley floor;
- Views across and within the valley restricted by large woodland areas.

Roman River Valley Floor (A3)

- Narrow, meandering floodplain of the Roman River, becoming slightly broader at itsconfluence with the River Colne;
- Several marshy areas adjacent to the river, supporting riparian/ wetland vegetation withinthe enclaves created by meanders;
- Single mature deciduous trees adjacent to and as landscape features on the edge of marshyareas adjacent to Ferry Road at the confluence of the Roman and Colne Rivers;
- Views across the open river mouth to High Park corner in the south and Wivenhoe in thenorth;
- Rowhedge Warehouses as a dominant landmark on the edge of the floodplain to the southof Wivenhoe.

Colne River Valley Slopes (A5)

- Relatively steep v-shaped valley slopes facilitate attractive and open views across and alongthe River corridor;
- Principal road network consisting of narrow tree-lined (sometimes sunken) lanes traversingthe valley sides to the north and south;
- A mosaic of medium to large-sized irregular and regular, predominantly arable fields with medium hedgerows containing semi-mature/ mature hedgerow trees;
- Some larger semi-enclosed arable fields to the west of Wakes Colne; and concentrations ofsmaller fields with intact hedge boundaries adjacent to settlements;
- Settlement pattern consists of small linear village settlements such as Wakes Colne and Eight Ash Green, adjacent to the north-south roads, which cross the River Valley; small hamletsand farmsteads.

Ardleigh River Valley (A6)

- Lower reaches of a small narrow river valley encompassing the Salary Brook and steepvalley sides;
- Wooded western valley slopes (patches of ancient deciduous woodland);
- Small regular fields on the valley sides in proximity to Salary Brook, becoming largeradjacent to the south;
- Connects to the large Ardleigh reservoir and remainder of the character area outside theborough boundary to the north.

Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau (B3)

- An area of sloping farmland plateau (with a mixture of small, medium and large predominantly arable fields) bordered by Colchester settlement fringes to the north and thewooded Roman River Valley to the south;
- Influence of the military (East Donyland military training area & Middlewick Rifle Ranges) – disturbs tranquility whilst firing practice is taking place;
- Several large patches of woodland extend from the northern slopes of the Roman River valley, onto the plateau;
- Several small lakes and ponds, within disused sand and gravel works;
- Character area provides physical and visual separation between Colchester urban area and the Roman River Valley;
- Fragmented and sometimes chaotic landscape structure with numerous unrelated land uses.

Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau (B6)

- Small to medium scale arable fields with concentrations of mature trees at field boundaries;
- Interesting field pattern consisting of small, regular fields to the south of Boxted and also tothe east of Great Horkesley;
- Orchards in close proximity to Great Horkesley;
- Farmland plateau crossed in a north-south direction by two straight roads, which connect with Colchester's northern settlement fringe. Linear settlement pattern extends from the layout of these roads;
- A network of narrow lanes (sometimes sunken), which are lined by trees and hedgesconnect the remainder of the character area with the two main north south roads;
- Hedgerows are diverse and well managed/ clipped in most places.

Langham Farmland Plateau (B7)

- Langham airfield – clipped straight hedges adjacent to Park Lane;
- Silver birches within field boundaries to the east of disused Langham airfield;
- Large-scale arable fields with some remnant orchards now cover the large expanse ofairfield;
- Paddocks, surrounded by wooden post and rail fences;
- Airfield dominates field pattern.

Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau (B8)

- Small, irregular patches of woodland;
- Plateau, predominantly arable farmland consisting of medium to large arable irregular fieldswith gappy field boundaries;
- Well-connected network of lanes and footpaths traversing the area;
- Distinctive Wivenhoe Park and Lodge adjacent to the University of Essex site.

Fingringhoe Open Coastal Estuarine Marsh (C1)

- Mosaic of open saltmarshes, mudflats, narrow winding creeks and channels, adjacent to theRiver Colne;
- Inter-tidal landscape, constantly washed by the sea which provides movement;
- Separated from a backdrop of drained coastal marshes and open coastal farmland byprominent sea walls;
- Remote, inaccessible character accentuated by the sounds of gulls and other birds.

Colne Drained Coastal Estuarine Marsh (D3)

- Corridor of rough grassland and grazing marsh lines the River Colne;
- Scattered patches of low-lying scrub;
- Network of drainage ditches in places;
- Visual influence of main railway line which runs through parts of the area.

Langenhoe Coastal Farmland (E3)

- Area of gently sloping open coastal farmland with distinctive topographical knolls housingPeldon and Abberton/Langenhoe settlements;
- Predominantly arable farmland with patches of rough grassland and small patches ofwoodland;
- Generally undeveloped character and large-scale field pattern;
- Isolated farmsteads situated along narrow lanes;
- Rifle ranges to the east of Langenhoe.

3.3.9 The Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment[11] has identified the following landscapecharacter areas within the Study Area (see **Figure 2.5**):

Ardleigh Valley System (6B)

- Steep sided wooded valley hidden from the surrounding farmed plateau.
- Ancient deciduous woodland clings to valley sides and alder and willow dominatestreamlines.
- Leafy lanes drop steeply down the valley side and cross the streams on stone bridges e.g.Springvalley Lane.
- The A120 and railway line, in contrast, cut across the valley on embankments, fragment thevalley both visually and physically.
- Spring Valley Mill is the only remaining example of a water mill in Tendring.
- Ardleigh Reservoir floods the two northernmost arms of the valley system.

Alresford Valley System (6C)

- A series of distinct river valleys, steep sided in places, containing Sixpenny, Tenpenny andBentley Brooks and including the slopes descending to the Colne Estuary.
- The intimate, leafy character contrasts with the adjacent expansive open arable landscapesof the heathland plateau.
- Large areas of deciduous woodland including Thorringtonhall Wood, one of the largestancient woodlands in the district.
- Old coppice stools are visible in many of the woodlands.
- Historic lanes drop steeply down the valley side and cross the brooks at ancient crossingpoints.
- Sparse settlement consisting of scattered cottages and isolated farms.
- Recent infill has resulted in ribbon development on the edge of Thorrington Cross.
- Gravel pits and sewage works are present.

Bromley Heaths (7A)

- Exposed and windswept plateau corresponding to the highest part of the district.
- Deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support a high grade agriculturalland.
- Large scale productive arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows where hedgerow oaksstand out as silhouettes against the skyline.
- Apple orchards around Ardleigh, Elmstead and Frating are sheltered by belts of poplar orfast growing Leylandii.
- Former heaths largely converted to smallholdings or regenerating as woodland. Small areasof remnant heath survive.
- Neglected oak/sweet chestnut coppice with ground flora typical of acidic woodland soils.
- Low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered farms and halls, hamlets, villages and smallmarket towns.
- Network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages and roadside vergesoften containing gorse and bracken.
- Dramatic, dominating skyscape.

Townscape Character Areas

3.3.10 The following Townscape Character Areas[12] in Colchester are inter-visible with, or are immediately adjacent to, the Study Area (see **Figure 2.6**):

E2 – Elmstead Road (Edwardian Suburbs)

3.3.11 This Character Area encompasses a short row of housing, which lines Elmstead Road (a mainpedestrian and bus link from the University of Essex to the town centre). The area is close proximity to the River Colne, the Hythe and the University of Essex. Housing within the area isgenerally isolated from other nearby residential areas within the Hythe by roundabouts and thelarge Tesco supermarket, which is opposite. Houses are generally raised from street level (with steep steps leading up to front doors and raised front gardens) and are predominantly brick, with consistency in architectural details. The area has a busy character on account of its proximity to several main roads and junctions.

F11 – Hawthorn Avenue (Inter-War/Post-War Suburbs)

3.3.12 This relatively high-density area of inter-war housing consists of a combination of two-storey semi-detached and terraced houses with two and three-storey flats set out in a courtyard layout. Hazelmere Infant and Nursery School and Sir Charles Lucas Arts College are locatedwithin the residential area. There is overall uniformity in architectural style, which leads to a recognisable localised sense of place. Overall, however, the streetscape is bland and utilitarian with a limited

number of public open spaces punctuating built form.

F13 – Cheveling Road (Inter-War/Post-War Suburbs)

3.3.13 This suburb of inter-war housing is situated close to the southern edge of Colchester's urbanarea and is set back from Old Heath Road, which runs to the east of the area. Housing is setout in a slightly curvilinear pattern following Cheveling Road. There is consistency in architectural style, form and materials, which are typical of this period. Sense of place is recognised by views to the large industrial/commercial development on the opposite side of Old Heath Road and views to Middlewick Firing Ranges to the west.

H13 – St. John's Road (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.14 An area of post-1960s detached and semi-detached housing which is based around two mainroads and a number of closes and cul-de-sacs. Housing along Templewood and Churnwood Roads (to the south of the railway line) has a very similar character and is therefore included within this area, even though the railway line physically separates the two residential blocks. Housing is relatively low density, and most houses have private gardens and drives. Overall, this area lacks sense of place, but is quiet and feels safe.

H14 – Roach Vale (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.15 This residential suburb is located at the north eastern edge of the urban area and is separatedinto two halves by a large swathe of greenspace (comprising school playing fields, sports ground and Welsh Wood). The curvilinear street pattern and architectural style is typical of other such modern (c.1980s/1990s) housing developments both within the Borough and throughout the United Kingdom. At the eastern edge, housing overlooks Welsh Wood and thevalley of Salary Brook.

H15 – Longridge (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.16 This residential suburb is situated at the eastern edge of the urban area and overlooks SalaryBrook Valley to the east. Housing ranges from large, predominantly detached, red brick houses with large gardens and clear definition between public and private space in the northern part ofthe area, to bungalows and terraces within the southern part. All properties characteristically obtain views across the valley, providing distinctive setting and sense of place. Street pattern is

Curvilinear, with several avenues and closes leading off Longridge Road (the main vehicular access road).

H19 – Avon Way (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.17 This large residential suburb occupies the northern slope of Salary Brook Valley and lines thesouth eastern

urban edge of Colchester. Housing comprises a combination of semi-detachedhouses, terraces and low-rise blocks of flats with varying architectural styles and details, ranging from c.late 1970s to c.1990s. Occasional street trees are visible within the combined curvilinear and grid street pattern. However, overall streetscape character is bland and stark. Open viewsacross the Colne Valley and Salary Brook Valley can be gained from within the Character Area, contributing to a recognisable sense of place. Avon Way, a busy traffic route, disturbs overallsense of tranquility within the area.

H20 – The Hythe (Post-1960s Suburbs)

This recently redeveloped mixed use area contains private and University accommodation alongside a large commercial superstore (B&Q). Housing is arranged as large blocks of accommodation (between three and six storeys) which overlook the river corridor and are situated on the eastern bank of the River Colne. Large areas of car parking associated with residential development and the superstore are a dominant character of this area. This area iswithin the Hythe and character is sometimes disturbed with noise from the adjacent railway corridor, Hythe industrial/commercial area and river. Traffic congestion also detracts from an otherwise coherent character. Open views along the river and to other areas of the Hythe addidentity to the character of this area and help to determine an overall distinct sense of place.

I9 – Severalls Lane/Colchester Business Park (20th Century Retail, Commerce & Industry)

3.3.18 This area of light industrial units and warehouses is located at the northern extent of Colchester urban area, bounded to the north by the A12. A number of car showrooms located along the northern end of Ipswich Road are also within this Character Area. A combination of large buildings constructed from varying materials, with large colourful signs, creates a somewhat chaotic character.

I10 – The Hythe (20th Century Retail, Commerce & Industry)

3.3.19 This area lines the western banks of the River Colne and contains a large number of industrialand commercial buildings, some of which are associated with the current and former use of theRiver Corridor. The character of the area is dominated by the riverscape and associated industrial land use. The area generally has a mixed character with a mixture of 'fringe-type' elements such as caravans, Lorries and industrial material associated with fishing boats on theriver. On-street parking is also a feature of this area. Views along the river corridor and to othertaller industrial buildings evoke a sense of place within the area. Character is dominated by amixture of 'hard' elements, such as tall metal fencing lining industrial areas to the east and tarmac road surfacing. Pylons, which cross the river and also the Character Area are dominant landmarks within views from surrounding Character Areas. Corrugated metal grain silos overlooking the river are also landmark features contributing to the

character of the area. Viewsto new four-, five- and six-storey buildings on the opposite side of the river and also views to tower blocks on the campus of the University of Essex can be gained from the area. The Character Area is situated within The Hythe East Colchester Regeneration Area 30 and overall townscape is therefore in a state of flux.

J8 – Ipswich Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.20 This Character Area includes housing, which has developed along the line of Ipswich Road, and is located within the northwestern part of Colchester's urban area. Houses have various architectural styles and cover several periods from medieval to post-1960s (modern) infill. Characteristically houses are set back from the road by front gardens, with all houses facing the road. A mixture of semi-detached and detached houses with bungalows also being typical of the area. Views into the Colne Valley from the southern end of Ipswich Road contribute to providing a recognisable sense of place.

J10 – Old Heath Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.21 This Character Area encompasses housing (and occasional shops) along both sides of Old Heath Road, which is situated to the east of Middlewick ranges and west of the Hythe, at the western edge of the urban area. Views across open farmland, Hythe Marshes and the floodplain of the River Colne can be gained from the backs of houses along the eastern side ofOld Heath Road. Views to the tower blocks of the University of Essex campus can also be gained from this Character Area, contributing to a recognisable sense of place. Housing facades are more or less continuous along Old Heath Road, with mixed architectural styles, dating from Victorian to post-war, with occasional post-1960s infill.

J11 – Harwich Road & St. John's Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.22 This relatively small Character Area encompasses housing which lines the main Harwich Road and southern end of St John's Road. Houses within the area range from Victorian to post-1960s period, with a predominance of postwar housing and modern development towards the northern end. A mixture of terraced, semi-detached and detached houses are typical of this area. Occasional small shops also line Harwich Road. The southern end of St John's Road comprises semi-detached and detached houses and bungalows.

J12 – Welshwood Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.23 This relatively small and compact Character Area is located adjacent to Welshwood Park. It contains a unique and diverse mixture of detached houses, which are set back from the wideWelshwood Road and have large front and back gardens. Houses are set within a woodland glade, which creates a diverse and tranquil character. Architectural age and style varies on aplot-by-plot basis (some with thatched roofs,

others with timber-facing). Harmony is brought tothe area by the presence of mature woodland trees, which create enclosure, and strong localised sense of place.

3.3.24 The following Townscape Character Areas in Wivenhoe are inter-visible with, or are immediately adjacent to, the Study Area (**Figure 2.6)**:

F1 - Rectory Road (Inter-War/Post-War Suburbs)

3.3.25 This Character Area contains a small linear belt of predominantly post-war houses that line thenorthern and southern sides of a short section of Rectory Road, which connects with Colchester Road and the Avenue in the west, and then runs along the northwestern edge of Wivenhoe. There is consistency in architectural style and detail, generally red brick houses, of which several have bay windows. Houses generally have small front gardens, which provideseparation along the road corridor and contribute visual interest to the character of the area. Adjacent residential areas to the north, south and west provide a sense of enclosure, with open views across allotments and Wivenhoe Cricket Ground from the back of properties along the northern edge of Rectory Road. There are generally few views into or out of the area, other than to directly adjacent residential areas.

H1 - Vine Drive (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.26 This suburb of post-1960s housing is situated at the northeastern edge of Wivenhoe's urban area, overlooking open countryside to the north and east. Street pattern is predominantly curvilinear, with two-storey, semi-detached and detached properties arranged around a seriesof closes and avenues leading from Broadfields, Vine Drive, Richard Avenue and Field Way. Bungalows are also present within the Character Area (Llamas Drive) and a row of shops along Broadfields creates a lively and bustling entrance to the northern end of this otherwise secluded suburb. The area is set back from the main road (Avenue Road, which later becomes the High Street to the south). Several areas of publicly accessible grassland/open space are dotted amongst the urban structure, with one patch to the south of Richard Avenue and a large area of allotments and a cricket ground at the southern edge of the area.

H3 - Broome Grove (Post-1960s Suburbs)

3.3.27 This predominantly 1980s/1990s residential area is situated at the northwestern edge of Wivenhoe and overlooks the Colne Valley and open fields on the valley side to the north andwest. Views across the valley are however limited by small patches of woodland at the western settlement edge. Street pattern is predominantly curvilinear, with housing set out along a number of drives and crescents, which lead off Broome Grove Road. Housing is predominantlysemi-detached and two-storeys in height. Although relatively homogenous in terms of architectural style, red and buff brick predominates, streetscape is generally bland,

particularlywith few street trees to enhance the character of the area.

J1 - Elmstead Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.28 This relatively long area of mixed age suburbs lines Elmstead/Colchester Roads with Colchester and the University of Essex to the north, and Wivenhoe retail and historic core to the south. Properties within this area have developed along the line of the road corridor and generally face the main road. The streetscape is quite wide and varied, with visual interest provided byvegetation within small front gardens. The area has a bustling and busy character on account of noise and movement associated with Elmstead/Colchester Roads and contains a mixture of different architectural styles and details.

J2 - Rectory Road (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.29 This Character Area contains a mixture of different architectural styles dating from different periods of urban development. The area is situated at the northeastern edge of Wivenhoe's urban area and contains a combination of Victorian, post-war and modern (post-1960s) housing, which line the main road corridor. Streetscape is generally distinctive, with several street trees and patches of mature vegetation within front gardens along the road corridor. Thearea is enclosed to the south by adjacent residential areas and is more open to the north, overlooking open fields.

J3 - Black Horse Corner (Mixed Age Suburbs)

3.3.30 This Character Area contains a mixture of buildings from differing architectural periods: post-war to post-1960s. Overall street pattern is linear, with houses facing the road corridors.
Properties are detached, often exhibiting distinctive and interesting architecture and set withinlarge plots along Alresford Road. Properties are also detached and set within slightly smallerplots along Keelars Lane to the north. The area has a relatively secluded and tranquil character, despite proximity to the working sand and gravel pits along the northern edge of the area. Open views across adjacent fields can be gained to the south and east.

Landscape Designations

3.3.31 Landscape designations within the Study Area are shown on **Figure 2.7** and described below:

Wivenhoe Park Grade II Registered Park and Garden

3.3.32 Wivenhoe Park Grade II Registered Park and Garden is located immediately to the west of the Study Area, north of Wivenhoe. The Park is associated with the Grade II* Listed WivenhoeHouse, and includes a designed

garden area, originally laid out in 1847-48 by WA Nesfield, and parkland beyond, laid out by Richard Woods in 1777. The Park is scattered with mature oaks, sweet chestnut, lime, and beech, predominantly dating from the mid C19, with a series of three lakes running through the valley. The land is now managed for a variety of purposes bythe University.

Colchester Castle Park Grade II Registered Historic Park and Garden

3.3.33 Colchester Castle Park Grade II Registered Historic Park and Garden is located 2.5km to the west of the Study Area, in the centre of Colchester. The Park is 9ha of late 19th century public park set around the remains of Colchester Castle and an 18th century house (now a museum).

3.3.34 High Woods Country Park is located approximately 1km to the west of the Study Area, within the northern area of Colchester. The Country Park has a range of facilities including a network ofpaths for walking and cycling, play areas, fishing, and a visitor centre.

Visual Amenity

3.3.35 Field work was undertaken to validate the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping (see **Figure 2.1).** This has established that the actual Zone of Visual Influence (or visual envelope) ofthe Study Area is considerably more limited than the ZTV suggests.

3.3.36 An appraisal of the Study Area's visual amenity has been made following fieldwork and reference to 1:10,000 and 1:25,000 scale Ordnance Survey maps of the area. In addition, a series of colour photographs have been taken from viewpoints within the Study Area that are representative of views accessible to the public (see **Figure 2.8**).

3.3.37 All photographs were updated and taken in September 2021 and their locations are indicated on **Figure 2.8**. It should be noted that the screening effect of vegetation will be diminished during winter whendeciduous vegetation is not in leaf. The photographs are presented on **Figure 2.9-3.5** and described below:

Viewpoint 1a – St. John's close north

3.3.38 Viewpoint 1a shows a view north from the access point across an area of grassed open space at the corner of St. John's Close, looking towards houses in Woodview Close. The view shows thetypically partial screening of views towards the houses to the north by the trees, hedgerows and woodland (Bullock Wood) along the field boundary at the edge of the Study Area and within the existing housing.

Viewpoint 1b- St. John's close south

3.3.39 Viewpoint 1b shows a view south from the access point across an area of grassed open space at the corner of St. John's Close, looking toward arable fields and mature vegetation structure. The view shows screening of long distance views due to mature vegetation along the field boundary.

Viewpoint 3 - Bromley road

3.3.40 Viewpoint 3 shows a view north from the car park of The Beehive pub on Bromley Road. Theview across the pub garden to the arable fields beyond is obscured by trees and hedges, givingonly glimpsed views.

Viewpoint 4 - Bromley road north

3.3.41 Viewpoint 4 shows a view north from Bromley Road. The view across the road shows new development within the foreground, including post and rail fencing, gravel driveways and two-storey houses. The majority of the view is screened by development with glimpses through to the wider landscape.

Viewpoint 14 – Church road

3.3.42 Viewpoint 14 shows a view west into the Study Area from Church road. The view is of new housing development on former arable fields with some temporary construction work in the foreground, a new landscape SUDS area with post and rail fencing.

Viewpoint 15 – Sherbourne road

3.3.43 Viewpoint 15 shows a view south east into the Study Area from Sherbourne Road (residential) and adjacent cycle route, which runs along the edge of the town. The view shows the partial screening of views by the trees, hedgerows and woodland, as well as the rising topography which also limits the range of views.

Viewpoint 16 – Junction B1027

3.3.44 Viewpoint 16 shows a view north across the junction between the B1027 and A133. The view shows the trees and high hedgerows that typically provide screening across the Study Area, giving only occasional glimpsed views into the fields beyond.

Viewpoint 19 – B1027 road

3.3.45 Viewpoint 19 shows a view west into Wivenhoe Park from the B1027. The view is very short in range due to the presence of trees and buildings, which provide dense screening along this stretch of the Study Area

boundary.

Viewpoint 20 – Access road to University of Essex

3.3.46 Viewpoint 20 shows a view north west from the access road to the University of Essex site at Wivenhoe Park. The view shows the tall parkland trees and hedgerows across the campus that provide screening, giving only intermittent views to the large university buildings. (NB. There will be views from the upper floors of the university buildings into parts of the Study Area)

Viewpoint 21 – Jack Hatch Way 01

3.3.47 Viewpoint 21 shows a view north (looking towards Wivenhoe Park) from the public footpath between Jack Hatch Way, Wivenhoe and the University of Essex site at Wivenhoe. The view shows the high hedgerows and trees that make up field boundaries and provide screening, obscuring long distance views.

Viewpoint 22 - Jack Hatch Way 02

3.3.48 Viewpoint 22 shows a view west from the public footpath between Jack Hatch Way, Wivenhoe and the University of Essex site at Wivenhoe Park. The view shows longer distance visibility towards Hythe Marshes and the eastern edge of Colchester, as the topography falls away to the Study Area boundary and beyond; but the landscape is frequently interspersed with high hedgerows, trees and woodland blocks that provide effective screening, and limit the extent of visibility.

Viewpoint 23 - Jack Hatch Way 03

3.3.49 Viewpoint 23 shows a view north from the public footpath between Jack Hatch Way, Wivenhoe and the University of Essex site at Wivenhoe Park. The view shows the rising topography towards the north, obscuring views from the residential areas in Wivenhoe (to the south) into the Study Area , and the hedgerows and trees that make up field boundaries and provide screening, obscuring long distance views within the Study Area .

Viewpoints 2, 6, 8b, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27

3.3.50 These viewpoints all show views which are typical of much of the Study Area. These are views of varying length across fields, either arable or pasture, which are truncated by the presence of trees and hedgerows. All these views are limited due to the screening effect of the vegetation.

Viewpoints 5, 7, 8a, 24, 28

3.3.51 These also all show views which are typical of those from the public roads across much of the study area. The views are limited by high hedges, with only glimpses of the fields beyond, views which are truncated by the presence of trees and hedgerows.

Changes to view due to new development

Viewpoint 4

3.3.52 Change of view from rural open fields to new development consisting of 4 dwellings with driveways, front garden landscaping. [21/00498/DETAIL(Colchester Borough Council)] View largely consists of new development within foreground, glimpses of long distance views through gaps between dwellings.

Viewpoint 14

3.3.53 Change of view from rural open fields to new development consisting of 32 dwellings with associated landscaping. [18/01307/DETAIL (Tendring District Council)] Long distance views are not applicable due to new development within foreground, screening any long distance views west toward Study Area.

3.3.54 All other viewpoints are mostly unchanged with the exception of mature vegetation.

3.3.55 Additionally new development exists within the Study Are and included the following:

- **Land off Bromley Road, Parsons Heath, Colchester (Tendring District Council 17/00859/OUT)**

  Located adjacent to west of Study Area boundary. Consisting of up to 145 dwellings, removal of prefabricated livery stables and the provision of public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage systems and vehicular access point from Bromley Road.

- **Land to east of Tye Road, Elmstead (Tendring District Council 18/01307/DETAIL)**

  Located adjacent to the eastern border and within the Study Area. Consisting of 32 dwellings, land for a community facility and associated parking and infrastructure.

- **Lands to north of Bromley Road, Ardleigh (Colchester Borough Council 21/00498/DETAIL)**

  Located north of Bromley road within west part of the Study Area. Consisting of 4 detached dwellings and associated landscaping.

- **Land and to the West of Church Road Elmstead CO7 7AW (Tendring District Council 18/01884/FUL)**

  Located adjacent to the eastern border and within the Study Area. Consisting of 41 dwellings, with means of access, parking, garaging, associated landscaping/allotments and public open space provision.

3.4 Constraints and Opportunities

Landscape/Townscape Character

3.4.1 The existing character of the small scale, regular shaped, intensive, arable farmland with mature and dense field boundaries along the eastern edge of Colchester, around Wivenhoe and around small settlements; of the medium scale, regular shaped, intensive, arable farmland with mature and dense field boundaries in the rest of Study Area ; woodland/ancient woodland scattered within the Study Area ; and river valleys east of Colchester and south of Wivenhoe, is typical of the wider landscape identified by the national, county and borough landscape assessments discussed in Section 3.3.4 to 3.3.31. A further detailed study has been undertaken to ensure that the landscape character has not changed since 2005.

3.4.2 The principal effect of the development of the Study Area would be a change from a rural arable character to a residential character. The degree of this change would be related to the siting, design and size of the Study Area and how many of the mature hedgerows and trees would form part of the landscaping for the proposed development.

Landscape Designations

3.4.3 Development on the Study Area is unlikely to be constrained by the settings of the Severalls Hospital Grade II Historic Park and Garden or Colchester Castle Grade II Historic Park and Garden, as there is no inter-visibility between these landscape designations and the Study Area due to the distance involved, the topography of the area and the presence of intervening vegetation and buildings. The High Woods Country Park would also be unaffected by development on the Study Area for similar reasons. There is, however, likely to be a need to consider protecting the setting of Wivenhoe Grade II Historic Park and Garden, as this designated landscape is adjacent to the south eastern boundary of the Study Area .

Visual Amenity

3.4.4 The flat plateau of the Study Area is only raised slightly in the northern part of the Study Area. The Ardleigh River Valley cuts a low lying corridor in north to south direction through the Study Area. Long distance views within and to the surrounding to the Study Area are rare due to intervening woodland and mature and dense vegetated field boundaries. There are no inter-visibilities between Colchester town centre and the Study Area.

3.4.5 Views into the Study Area are short distance from the immediately adjacent houses of the urban edge of East Colchester, the northern edge of Wivenhoe and around the smaller settlements within the Site. The

immediately adjacent houses act as a screen creating only intermittent glimpsed views for other houses further from the Site. In addition, the majority of views are partially screened by the hedgerows and trees at the end of gardens and along field boundaries and adjacent woodland.

3.4.6 To the north of the Site, views from and towards the A12 are very limited due to the presence of mature trees and shrubs along the trunk road. There are also some influences from the train lines which run through the site. But again, views from and towards them are very limited due to the presence of mature trees and shrubs.

3.4.7 Listed Buildings which is located within the Site would potentially be directly affected by development. However the magnitude of this effect would be related to the final siting and design of the development and whether the tall mature vegetation surrounding the residential property would be retained.

3.4.8 In addition, within the Site is a comprehensive network of Public Rights of Way and recreation grounds which provide public access to a large part of the area. The visual amenity of these areas would potentially be affected. However the magnitude of this effect would be related to the final siting and design of the development and whether the tall mature vegetation surrounding the footpaths and recreation ground would be retained.

Wivenhoe Park

3.4.9 Following further survey and assessment in September 2021, it was concluded that views within Wivenhoe Park looking out in all directions are largely screened due to the existing mature vegetation boundary. Views south from within the Study Area toward Wivenhoe Park are screened due to intervening mature vegetation structure and A133 road running to the north of the park. Refer to figures 4.1-4.4.

Landscape Capacity

3.4.10 The Study into the Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough (Chris Blandford Associates, 2005) assessed the land in the western part of the Study Area adjacent to the eastern edge of Colchester as generally moderate or high landscape sensitivity. As a result, the capacity of the landscape within this part of the Study Area is assessed as mostly limited, with some potential capacity to the east of Wivenhoe. The Study concluded that this area has a low ability to be able to accommodate development without degradation of landscape characteristics that are of local value. The Study noted that mitigation and enhancement measures would be required in cases where some change is possible.

Green Gaps

3.4.11 The Assessment of Open Countryside between Settlements in the Borough of Colchester (Chris Blandford Associates, 2009) identifies the contribution provided by open countryside in maintaining the physical and visual separation (referred to informally as 'green gaps') between Colchester and adjacent settlements, including Wivenhoe within the Study Area. The overall findings of the Study confirmed that:

'The open countryside between settlements generally provides a high contribution to the separation of settlements. The limitations on inter-visibility (i.e. visibility between settlements) and intra-visibility (i.e. the ability to see the edges of two or more settlements from a single point in the intervening landscape) resulting from visual enclosure by landform and vegetation in the open countryside, and the strength of rural character provide a significant contribution to the actual and perceived separation of settlements in many instances. On the basis of the work carried out for this study, areas that provide a high contribution to the separation of settlements are considered to be essential in helping retain the character and identity of the Borough's key settlements, and should be safeguarded from inappropriate development. Any new built development on this land is likely to seriously undermine the sense of settlement separation and the strong rural character of the land.'

3.4.12 With regards to the assessment of the open countryside between Colchester and Wivenhoe specifically, the Study concluded that:

'Any new built development, as defined, on the land identified as providing a high contribution to the separation of settlements is likely to seriously undermine both the sense of settlement separation, and the strong rural character of land outside the university campus. In spite of the visual enclosure provided by field boundary hedgerows, woodland and campus trees, new development would result in a diminished sense of leaving one settlement and entering another for people travelling along the roads and public footpaths between the settlements. Any new development south of the campus is likely to result in visual coalescence with existing campus buildings. There is potential for some new built development to be accommodated within the university campus, provided that the new buildings are not visually obtrusive. Any new development on the eastern side slopes of the Rover Colne Valley would be visually prominent and is likely to be perceived as an extension of Colchester in views from the railway, from western parts of the valley and from viewpoints further to the west.

There is one parcel of land on the northern edge of Wivenhoe, identified as providing a medium contribution to the separation of settlements, which has some potential to accommodate new built development without significantly diminishing the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land. This land parcel has existing built development on its western, eastern and southern edges, is not visually prominent from the wider landscape, and has some visual enclosure provided by peripheral hedgerows.

The narrow stream valley on the southern edge of Colchester, identified as providing a low contribution to the separation of settlements, has the most potential in relative terms to accommodate new built development, as the land is under a strong urban influence and is visually enclosed from most parts of the plateau to the south. Any new built development in this valley would not diminish the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land. However, this assessment does not take account of other issues such as potential flooding and recreational value.'

3.4.13 On the basis of this Study, the majority of land within the south-eastern corner of the Study Area (broadly delineated by Brightlingsea Road, Slough Lane and Churn Wood) is considered to provide a high contribution to the separation of Colchester and Wivenhoe, which is essential in helping retain the character and identity

of these settlements. It is therefore considered desirable to safeguard this part of the Study Area from inappropriate development.

Link Road

3.4.14 Since the 2015 audit report a new Link Road has been granted permission in the form of a new dual carriageway link-road between the A120 and the A133. It will be served by new services, facilities and infrastructure including a new 'Rapid Transit System' (RTS), at the time of writing this report update no construction work has commenced on the new road.

3.4.15 The Environmental assessment accompanying the planning application set out mitigation measures including:

- Linear belts of trees and shrubs and hedgerows with trees would screen traffic on link road by summer year 15.
- Planting proposed to West and east of link road to mitigate impacts on existing visual receptors and integrate the link road scheme into the existing landscape
- As a result the Environmental assessment states that visual receptors in Colchester, Wivenhoe and Elmstead Market are not considered likely to experience significant adverse effects...

The assessment and mitigation are for the Link Road alone and do not cover any effects of the GC itself on either the existing settlements or the wider landscape.

Strategic Green Gaps

3.4.16 In terms of 'Strategic Green Gaps', land south of the A133; and land east of the new A120/A133 Link Road and south of Allen's Farm are designated as such, The purpose of this designation is to give extra protection to the open countryside in key locations around the Garden Community in order to maintain long-term physical separation to the nearby settlements of Colchester, Wivenhoe and Elmstead Market and to ensure their individual settlement character is maintained and not threatened by coalescence.

Further Work Recommendations

3.4.17 The following further studies/surveys are recommended to inform the masterplanning, environmental assessment and mitigation for development on theStudy Area :

- A detailed visual impact assessment should be carried out from key locations during winter and summer to assess impact of development proposals on sensitive receptors in and around the Study Area as appropriate.

- A detailed landscape character assessment of the Study Area should be undertaken to inform assessment of potential landscape impacts and detailed mitigation measures.
- A detailed age and condition tree survey is required to inform the masterplanning process, by setting out the required distance between retained trees and development as defined by British Standard BS 5837:2012.

3.5 Summary

3.5.1 The Environmental Audit has demonstrated that development would change the character of the Study Area from a rural arable landscape to a residential dominated landscape, and change the nature of views within the Study Area. The degree of this change would depend on the scale of development and the extent to which mature hedgerows and trees are retained as part of the structural landscape framework for the Study Area.

3.5.2 The majority of land within the south-eastern corner of the Study Area (broadly delineated by Brightlingsea Road, Slough Lane and Churn Wood) provides a high contribution to the separation of Colchester and Wivenhoe, which is essential in helping retain the character and identity of these settlements. It is also important to maintain a sense of separation between any new development and the settlement at Elmstead Market, to mitigate the potential for coalescence of these settlements, which will help to retain the character and identity of the village in particular. It is therefore considered desirable to safeguard these parts of the Study Area from inappropriate development.

3.5.3 In recognition of the Study Area's high to moderate landscape value and sensitivity in most areas, care is needed through Study Area masterplanning and design to mitigate potential adverse impacts on the adjacent townscape or wider landscape. In particular, care should be taken to avoid loss of the woodlands and hedgerows/field boundaries that form screening elements in views from the edge of Colchester and Wivenhoe. The existing landscape structure across the Study Area should be retained and strengthened.

4.0 RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

4.1 General

4.0.1 The Environmental Audit provides information on the potential constraints and opportunities for development within the Study Area with regards to ecological, landscape/visual and water quality/flood risk considerations. This section identifies recommended mitigation measures and principles that should be considered for future masterplanning of the Study Area in relation to these environmental topics.

4.0.2 There are considerable opportunities to minimise potential adverse effects of development and provide green infrastructure benefits through the Study Area masterplanning process. The mitigation measures outlined below would support the objectives of the Colchester Borough Green Infrastructure Strategy for conserving and enhancing areas of existing wildlife habitat; responding to landscape character; and the conservation and enhancement of landscape assets. Strengthening the Public Rights of Way corridors through the retention and enhancement of adjacent hedgerows and vegetation belts across the Study Area would help provide screening for development land parcels, as well as providing habitat corridors to aid the dispersal for protected species.

4.0.3 It should be noted that the mitigation measures outlined below are not exhaustive; they are intended to provide broad guidance on the type of measures that are likely to be necessary in order to achieve a sustainable development on the Study Area.

5.1 Landscape and Visual Mitigation

4.1.1 Consideration should be given to retaining key landscape features within the Study Area through the masterplanning process. These would include the field hedgerows, mature trees and the woodland copses. Ancient woodland should also be protected wherever possible. In addition to providing benefits for ecology and nature conservation, the retention of these landscape features would help screen development from the existing residential properties in settlements surrounding the edge of the Study Area, as well as maintaining the existing views. Where there are gaps in hedgerows, new planting with native species would help enhance the existing hedgerows and strengthen screening.

4.1.2 Where access and other infrastructure is required to cross an existing hedgerow, consideration should be given to using existing gaps and weaknesses in the hedgerows wherever possible. Mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees are not easy to recreate, and their removal should be avoided as far as possible. There is also the opportunity to screen key views from the existing public rights of way that cross the Study Area by enhancing hedgerows along footpaths.

4.1.3 In addition, careful consideration should be given to the design and siting of street lighting to reduce the night-time visual impact of development on the surrounding countryside.

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 General

5.1.1 The key findings and conclusions of the Environmental Audit are summarised in this section.

5.2 Landscape and Visual Amenity

5.2.1 The Environmental Audit has demonstrated that development would change the character of the Study Area from a rural arable landscape to a residential dominated landscape, and change the nature of views within the Study Area. The degree of this change would depend on the scale of development and the extent to which mature hedgerows and trees are retained as part of the structural landscape framework for the Study Area.

5.2.2 The majority of land within the south-eastern corner of the Study Area (broadly delineated by Brightlingsea Road, Slough Lane and Churn Wood) provides a high contribution to the separation of Colchester and Wivenhoe, which is essential in helping retain the character and identity of these settlements. It is also important to maintain a sense of separation between any new development and the settlement at Elmstead Market, to mitigate the potential for coalescence of these settlements, which will help to retain the character and identity of the village in particular. It is therefore considered desirable to safeguard these parts of the Study Area from inappropriate development. Any development proposals in or adjacent to this area should undergo some iterative testing of the overall massing, buffer planting proposed and assessment of any potential impact on the setting of the Registered Park and Garden at Wivenhoe.

5.2.3 In recognition of the Study Area's high to moderate landscape value and sensitivity in most areas, care is needed through Study Area masterplanning and design to mitigate potential adverse impacts on the adjacent townscape or wider landscape. In particular, care should be taken to avoid loss of the woodlands and hedgerows/field boundaries that form screening elements in views from the edge of Colchester and Wivenhoe. The existing landscape structure across the Study Area should be retained and strengthened.

5.3 Overall Conclusions

5.3.1 In accordance with the Council's requirements, this Environmental Audit has provided a preliminary appraisal of the constraints and opportunities for development of the Study Area in respect of the following environmental considerations:

- Ecology and Nature Conservation.
- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity.

5.3.2 Within the scope of this Environmental Audit, no constraints have been identified that would at this stage preclude further consideration of the Study Area as a potential growth area (assuming that the recommended mitigation measures are implemented and the further surveys/studies undertaken).

Other environmental considerations may present constraints to development on the Study Area, such as cultural heritage and agricultural land use. These have not been considered in the scope of this Environmental Audit, and may need to be taken into account in determining the suitability of the Study Area for development.